

REVIEW

Maria Brutti, *The Development of the High Priesthood during the Pre-Hasmonean Period. History, Ideology, Theology* (Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 108), Brill: Leiden – Boston 2006, 342 pp.; ISBN 90 04 14910 4; ISSN 1384-2161.

The political and religious roles of Jerusalem's high priests have long been the subject of scholarly dispute. In the past few years, we have seen a growing interest in the subject (cf. D.W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs. The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel*, Oxford 2000; J. C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas. High Priests after the Exile*, Assen 2004). Many new views have been offered on this question, much though they differ. One thing that scholars are in agreement about is that high priests, as the highest-ranking officials, served not only as spiritual leaders of Judea but also its political representatives in relations with kings who ruled the land as a supreme authority. As the observations of M. Brutti show, at least in respect to the rule of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids over Judea, this belief is based more on speculation than on fact.

The Italian scholar made her subject the development of the high priesthood of the Jerusalem temple from Onias I to the death of Alcimus (159 B.C.), i.e., at the time prior to the position being served by members of the Hasmonean family which falls under the rule over Judea of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Such choice of chronological span is determined by more than historical considerations, since historical sources are also available which enable us to get a closer look at high priests at the time.

The author divided her lecture into three main parts: *Preliminary Issues* (pp. 3–118), *Reconstruction* (pp. 121–247), and *Synthesis: Development and Decline of an Institution* (pp. 251–305), while *Conclusion* (pp. 306–312) wraps up her argument. Each part is subdivided into chapters: three in part one, two each in parts two and three. Quoting chapter titles will help the reader understand the structure of the book. Chapter one (*The Sources*, pp. 3–55) offers a detailed discussion of all relevant sources with their respective value for her study. Listed first are those written by Jewish authors (1 Macc, 2 Macc, Josephus Flavius), followed by those by Greeks (Hecataeus of Abdera, Pseudo-Aristeas), and the Book of Sirach and the Book of Daniel. In chapter two (*Philological Issues*, pp. 56–75), the author discusses the origins of terms related to priestly functions, in particular the term ἀρχιερεύς, and their evolving meanings. Chapter three (*Historical Identity and Succession of the High Priests*, pp. 76–118) deals with a variety of questions applying to the position of high priest. Especially interesting among them is that which greatly helps in evaluating the high priest's political standing. The author describes it as a "presence-absence of the Jewish high priests in the sources related to the pre-Hasmonean period." That the high priest was

ignored in official documents quoted in sources, whether as an addressee or a partner for the Seleucids, is, she believes, evidence that he did not wield any political power (pp. 90ff.). Another question to which she devotes much attention is the Zadokite descent of high priests (p. 107ff.). She maintains, again contrary to general opinion, that sources provide no evidence for their shared biological genealogy. The tradition of Zadokite descent was created in the post-exilic period and was, in the author's opinion, purely ideological in nature, meant to emphasize the continuity of priestly lineage (p. 116).

In part two (*Reconstruction*), the most voluminous section in the book, M. Brutti analyzes source accounts as relating to high priests at the time the Ptolemies and Seleucids ruled over Judea. Each period is treated separately. The chief observation concerning the status of Jerusalem temple high priests under the Ptolemies is that sources offer no clues as to the extent of their power, only permitting insight into high priests' political attitudes and their responsibilities for fiscal duties to Egyptian rulers. A fuller picture is available of the political status of high priests under the Seleucids, especially for those officials who served their role at the time Jewish supporters were active for Hellenization, and those appointed by the kings of Syria. Brutti argues that as they became royal officials with a broad range of administrative powers, they lost any real impact on Judea's religious life and stopped taking active part in the daily rituals at the temple.

M. Brutti's conclusions in the *Synthesis* do not bear out all those views and hypotheses which attributed to Jerusalem's high priests a politically important role in the period preceding the Maccabees taking over the position. In her opinion, sources offer no basis for any confident judgments in this respect: "In conclusion, the question of the political authority of the high priest that had been the starting point of this investigation still remains an open question, and along with it the issue of the political status of the Jews, particularly under Seleucid rule" (p. 312).

Though frustrating to many, the conclusion on the last page in the book should not discourage anyone from reading it. M. Brutti shows great erudition in discussing all the major views and hypotheses so far presented in literature. The author highlights all that is valuable in them, and criticizes opinions that are arbitrary and unfounded. Although it may seem that the sheer effort M. Brutti put into writing the book is disproportionate to the value of her conclusions, a close reading will show such impression unjustified, for it is a precious realization that so many of the now accepted hypotheses and beliefs about Judean history between Alexander of Macedon's entry there and the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt call for a thorough revision.

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